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ABSTRACT

A series of partial studies aimed at understanding how much progress students can make in 1 year of second language study are described. The first concerns Swedish university students in their first year studying Spanish as a third language in higher education. Students were tested and interviewed for their perceptions of their language ability and the changes they experienced as a result of language study. In addition, research was conducted on: translation processes, using a think-aloud protocol, observation, and retrospection; native speakers' evaluations of the learners' Spanish translation; and features of the students' oral and written interlanguage. A comparison is then made with the interlanguage of Swedish learners of French. In each area of research, the focus is on students' intellectual as well as language skill development. Contains 48 references. (MSE)

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INTELLECTUAL AND LINGUISTIC PROGRESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

Students' development during their first year of Spanish at a Swedish university

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CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Investigated group of students 6

Conceptions of learning 7
Conceptions of learning in students of Spanish 9

Depth and surface approaches 14

Complexity and correctness in the mother tongue 18

Students´ translations 20
Research method..... 21
'Thinking-aloud' study 22
Observation 24
Completing the sentences or making changes 25
Retrospection 25
Interview 26
Special linguistic features examined 27

Native speakers´ evaluan 28
Spanish-speaking evaluators 29

Error analysis 32
Longitudinal study of students of Spanish 34
Oral prerformance 35
Written performance 36
Linguistic complexity 37
Translation 38
The interlanguage of Swedish students of French 41

Concluding remarks..... 42

*Introduction**

A number of day-to-day questions arising at a foreign-language department motivated this study. The most important being: "How ´good´ or ´bad´ are our students ´really´?" Quite a few people think that language students are, if not actually ´bad´, at least not among the best university students. University teachers often say that students used to know much more especially about grammar after secondary school. The ´native lecturers´ often think that the level of the students´ spoken language, except for English, is low. People working at the departments of general linguistics often think that the foreign-language learning is less intellectual than their own subject. University students of other subjects often see language learning as a "girly subject" - a lot of work, maybe, but not really an intellectual challenge. This essay has the intent to study how intellectual language students are and what progress they make in one academic year. Another reason for carrying out this research is that in trying to describe innovative university teaching of French a couple of years ago, I felt the need to know exactly what traditional language programs really can offer students. *(Enkvist, 1993:2; Enkvist 1994:5)*

The essay consists of a number of partial studies aiming at throwing at least some light on these questions. After presenting the student cohort, I am discussing the conceptions of learning of the Spanish students, followed by a discussion of different approaches to a particular intellectual task. There is also a study on the complexity and the correctness in the students´ use of their mother tongue. A rather long section is devoted to how students translate into the foreign language where I am using both a thinking-aloud study, and an observation and a retrospection study. Another is dedicated to native speakers´ evaluation of the students´ translations and some features in the oral and written ´interlanguage´ of the students are studied, as well. Finally, a comparision is made with the interlanguage of Swedish students of French. The studies aim at getting a better picture of the intellectual consciousness of the students and how ´good´ or ´bad´ they are at speaking the foreign language.

There has been an explosion of studies in the field of second-language research during the last twenty-thirty years, and each researcher highlights his/her particular factor as being important for successful language learning. For example: factors having to do with the students´ self-assessment; the degree of empathy for other people; the question of extroversion vs. introversion; integrative or instrumental motivation; the intensity and du-

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ration of motivation; differences in cognitive styles and different strategies; different attitudes to the cultural group represented by the target language; different attitudes to the learner´s cultural group from the target language speakers. New studies on motivation show how multifaceted this concept is. However, there is a general consensus that all language learning is cognitive, social, physiological, and psychological at the same time. Recent studies have also shown that students tend to ´know´ certain things in certain contexts, i.e. someone knows a certain structure, at least to a certain extent when discussing certain contents. *(Ellis, 1994; Romaine, 1989; Skehan, 1989; Pica, 1983)* but these findings have had little impact on university curricula.

According to many linguists the learning of a foreign language is a purely linguistic affair – what features are learnt, in what order, with what degree of accuracy. Most linguists are working with groups of children or immigrant workers who have received little, if any, formal training. Working with children and immigrants is a way of reducing the number of variables influencing the result and a way of getting at a "natural" way of learning. It is striking that significantly fewer studies are concerned with university students, comprising a large group of learners who is closer to the researchers´ own reality.

Linguistic and psycholinguistic researchers often work with Chomsky´s classic distinction between competence and performance. Competence refers to the abstract knowledge of language possessed by an ideal speaker-listener, removed from the constraints and inconveniences of real-time language use, whereas performance it shown in the actual use of the language. Reacting to this restrictive paradigm, Hymes and others have pointed out that grammatical competence is not enough.*(Hymes, 1971)* In order to be able to use a language you must have a communicative competence as well. More recently, pragmatics have come to the fore, and its proponents emphasize the difference between speaking correctly and speaking appropriately. Departments of languages at the university have traditionally devoted themselves to teaching ´competence´ and left ´performance´to the students, to be practiced during holiday travels. Hence, for obvious reasons, Krashen´s bold statement that we learn more through acquisition than by learning has seldom or never been discussed seriously at the university, since a Krashen-inspired view would question the whole organization of university language learning.*(Krashen, 1982)*

There has been a curious void between the insights about language that many university teachers hold in a research context and the every-day activities at the department. In research it is generally accepted that language plays a central role for human beings. It is our way of representing and signifying the world and our experience, our way of establishing and maintaining social contact and social roles, and of building and consoli-

dating our own identity. Researchers also insist that language is a tool, or a means, something you do rather than something you know.*(Slobin, 1979; Fairclough 1992)* However, in a classroom situation, most teachers revert to the attitude that students know so little that they must go through an elementary program of grammar and reading and that the "fancy stuff" like communicative training must wait. Given all this, the question is where do the students stand and how do they view the process of learning ?

The present study is trying to explore some aspects of the process of learning in foreign languages at the university. It draws upon a combination of linguistics, psycholinguistics, and pedagogy presenting an overview from the results of a project on the intellectual and linguistic progress of students of Spanish at a Swedish university during their first year of study. One of the aims of the study is to utilize the new perspectives in pedagogy and especially phenomenography to approach the world of foreign language education. In short, this is an interdisciplinary study aiming at throwing new light on what has traditionally been the exclusive domain of linguists. Initially, I will present the general problem and follow up by putting a precise question which link the problem to the student group investigated. Then I will present the main results of the research project. In each part I will try to answer to the particular question raised and compare my results with those of my fellow researchers the phenomenographers, the grammar-translation proponents, the teachers interested in the learning/acquisition issue, then the interlanguage people, and finally the teachers in the foreign language departments. My intentions is to initiate a discussion of the pedagogical consequences of my result. Thus, one could call it an attempt to present a ´dialogical´ research report, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word.

The investigated group of students

The research project was carried out at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, during three successive semesters, in 1992-1993. The participating students were all in their first or second semester; the particulars of every group will be explained in context with the research method used in different studies of project. There was no *'numerus clausus'* at the Spanish department, and all students who had studied Spanish for three years in secondary school or with equivalent knowledge were accepted. Most had had some work experience, travel or other studies before entering the program. All of the students had studied English and French or German at the secondary level before starting with Spanish. Thus, Spanish was normally their third foreign language.

The courses offered at the University of Gothenburg were within the traditional framework of university language courses in Sweden. In the first semester the students took a '20-credit course' and in the second a '40-credit continuation course'. Both were full-time courses consisting of a number of parallel courses, which were concluded by written or oral exams. There were no optional courses. The first semester, usually called a 20-credit course or an A-course, had a number of parallel courses:

General and Spanish grammar
Translation
Phonetics
Pronunciation
Spanish text 1
Spanish text 2
Latin American text 1
Latin American text 2
Spanish Text Commentary
Latin American Text Commentary
Conversation
Spanish Cultural Knowledge
Latin American Cultural Knowledge

The second-semester course, usually called a 40-credit course or a B-course, also consisted of a number of parallel courses:

The History of the Spanish language
Spanish Grammar
Translation to and from Spanish
Classical texts
The History of Spanish literature
The History of Latin American literature
Spanish texts
Latin American texts
Cultural knowledge (essay+text)
Oral examination on texts

The students were mostly examined in written tests. The students received about 20 hours of tuition per course. This particular study plan had been used for many years, and the same staff members had been responsible for the same courses for a long time. Thus,

the students who participated in this research project studied a well-established course in a traditional, well-established university.

Conceptions of learning

When people, not specializing in language, speak about language learning, most of them maintain that it is desirable to know foreign languages – but that it is too tedious to learn them. They associate language learning with rote learning, a concept of learning consistently negatively evaluated.*(Giorgi, 1986)*

According to Marton,*(1992)* phenomenography is a research approach which tries to identify the ways in which phenomena, or aspects of phenomena, are understood or appear to people. The researcher does not claim to know what things really ´are´ but what people think they are. A conception can be thought of as the relationship between a person and a phenomenon, that is, the focus is neither the individual nor the subject matter, but the two in conjunction. If one studies learning, it is seen as a relationship between the person and the material being learnt. A conception is a way of being aware of something. In this context, awareness is seen as a relationship between subject and object and as a person's way of experiencing the world at a given point in time.

According to phenomenography, an individual forms conceptions that are already 'in existence', and the role of the researcher is to find them. The method used is to collect data through interviews or in written form and to analyze them in order to see what qualitative differences there are between different conceptions. The result is a number of categories of description of the subject in question. One of the most well known study is the one in which Säljö*(1979)* studied a group of Open University social science students and could distinguish the following conceptions of learning:

1. This level sees learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge. Learning is acquiring information or 'knowing a lot'.

2. *Memorizing and reproducing*. The second level sees learning as memorizing. Learning is storing information that can be reproduced, for example in a test.

3. *Applying*. The third level sees learning as acquiring facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used for example in a work situation.

At the first three levels, knowledge is thought of as something given, something that exists out there waiting to be picked up, taken in and stored. It is something external to the learner and, at the first level, it is understood as being something rather mechanical, something that just happens or is done to you by teachers.

4. *Understanding*. At the fourth level learning is seen as making sense or abstracting meaning. Learning involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world. From the fourth level on, knowledge is not thought of as something existing independent of the learner but is rather seen as meaning developed by the learner. In a study situation, the learner develops meaning from the learning material, meaning that had not been developed prior to the learning experience. In this conception meaning is also thought to be constituted in one of two ways. The learner may look into the learning material, consider its various component parts, examine the relationships that appear between the components, and try to abstract its meaning as a whole, or the learner could develop an understanding by relating the learning material to other phenomena or contexts.

5. *Seeing something in a different way*. At the fifth level, learning is seen as interpreting and understanding reality in a different way. Learning involves comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge.

6. Marton et al.*(1991)* introduced a sixth level: *changing as a person*. Their results refer to students who have finished a whole degree course, and they point to the fact that discovering new perspectives and becoming more skilled changes the person and the way one looks at the world.

While meaning is absent in the first three conceptions of learning, it is given a central role in the last three. The fourth, fifth and sixth conceptions emphasize the internal, or personal aspect of learning: learning is seen as something that you do in order to understand the real world. The sixth conception implies an interactive effect: that the learner does not remain unchanged by the new insights. These three conceptions suggest a relativistic and complex view of knowledge and how it is achieved and used.

These conceptions correspond partly to seeing studies as either mainly vocational or mainly 'academic'. The students who study just to get their diploma might be content with rote learning and with reproducing the requested 'correct' answers to pass, level 2. Those who know something about the reality they are likely to be working in would like to know how to apply what they learn, level 3. Those who study out of a personal urge

to learn will not be content with anything less than level 4, to extract a personal meaning and to relate to earlier knowledge.

Since these concepts have been developed working with social science students, one could very well ask if these categories fit language learners?

Conceptions of learning in students of Spanish

Researchers working on conceptions of learning normally use student groups who have chosen longer study programs. One problem when investigating language students in Sweden compared to other groups is that few of the students study the language for more than one or two semesters, since it is difficult to make a living by knowing only one language.

For this study, data was collected on four different occasions: during the first weeks and one of the last weeks in two successive semesters. The students were asked to answer short questionnaires and they were video-taped while answering questions related to the same topics. The questions focussed on their learning of Spanish, their experiences during the semester and, what it was like to have learnt and to know a foreign language well.

When the students expressed their views they seldom gave a comprehensive view of the phenomena studied, but rather highlighted a few aspects. The research task was to decide just what these fragments were and establish categories into which the fragments could be ordered. Säljö´s method was used and a higher level always included the lower ones.

The conceptions shown by the students may be categorized as follows:

1a. *Proficiency.* To be able to understand, to have a large vocabulary, to know a lot of grammar, to master pronunciation, conversation and communication and to know about the culture of Spanish-speaking countries.

1b. *Level 1a. + some application.* To be able to use language for travelling and for holding a job where Spanish is used, typically in the tourist business.

This level is the only one where quantity dominates. The students speak about knowing a lot of vocabulary and grammar and a good deal about culture. All the students accept the idea that you have to know a lot about the countries whose language you are studying in

order to understand what is expressed. In other words, no student sees language studies as something purely technical, as code-switching.

2a. *Level 1b. + to be able to use the language at different stylistic levels*, on more or less formal occasions, and to understand ambiguity and jokes.

2b. *Level 2a + to be able to speak fluently*, i.e. to have automatic language habits and to speak correctly.

Level 2 is qualitative rather than quantitative. It is not only important to learn more language but to be able to use what you have learnt better, more fluently, more accurately and in a way better suited to the context. Level 2 clearly contains an aspect of skill.

3a. *Level 2b. + to be able to express oneself fully*, to be able to use and understand finer shades of meaning, to use language for analytical thinking, and to attain the freedom of being able to use the language creatively.

3b. *Number 3a. + a meta level, to understand how learning influences you*, i.e. to see yourself both as a subject of learning and as an object of teaching at the same time, to understand what happens to you when you study. This level corresponds to having a holistic view of learning and a metacognitive comprehension.

Level 3 conceives understanding and using a language in a very much more profound, more refined way and it entails a degree of introspection.

The first two levels of conceptions focus the foreign language, the object of study, whereas the third level emphasizes the relationship between the student and the language.

level	quantitative/qualitative	focus of interest
1a. proficiency	quantitative	the foreign language
1b. + some application		
2a + different levels of formality + ambiguity	qualitative	
2b. + fluency+ correctness		
3a. + express oneself fully		relationship between the learner and the foreign language
3b. + understand how learning influences you		

It should be noted that at the levels of conception 3a and 3b, the conception of what it is to know a foreign language well, is complex and comprises four very different kinds of skills or knowledge:

1. *An intellectual component combined with psychological insight: to understand the foreign culture.*

2. *A practical component based on knowledge: to be able to reproduce the foreign language.*

3. *A psychological component based on knowledge: to be able to express oneself fully.*

4. *A social component based on knowledge and psychological insight: to be able to interact and communicate, at a profound level.*

This enumeration also reads like a list of goals for ambitious language students. It is easily understood that language students often feel frustrated and that they are more aware of their shortcomings than of their achievements. It should be noticed that three of the factors are present from the start, from the conception 1a., namely to understand, to produce and to interact.

If we compare the categories of description found in language students with those found by Säljö, it is evident that the match is not perfect, in part because the investigated

language learners are advanced and do not express the lower levels of Säljö´s list, but also because there is a need for a more refined discrimination among the higher categories of description.

Säljö/Marton	Enkvist
1. increasing one´s knowledge	
2. memorizing and reproducing	
3. applying	
4. understanding	1a+1b proficiency + some application
5. seeing something in a different way	2a + 2b + 3a + 3b. understanding another
6. changing as a person	reality + expressing oneself fully

Even the least advanced conception of the language students includes level 3 and 4. The students see learning as acquiring more vocabulary, grammar and facts about Spanish-speaking countries. Nobody studies just to 'know' Spanish. Nor do students study Spanish just to reproduce their knowledge in tests. To be able to apply the knowledge is the lowest requirement, but it also includes making sense of what is heard and read and relating parts of the subject matter to the real world and to the self.

Some of the students who already spoke good Spanish before entering the course mentioned having learnt another way of using the language. They no longer only had access to the Spanish they had picked up in the streets. However, the students did not see reality in a new way but rather a completely new and unknown reality.

Marton et al. added the level "changing as a person as a result of having learnt". Their results refer to students who have finished a whole degree course, not only one semester. The Spanish students were asked in the last interview whether they perceived any change in themselves as a result of their studies. They all said no with some small variations. There are two possible reasons for this answer: One or two semesters is too short a time to create a change important enough to be perceived by the persons themselves, and there is not time enough to feel skilled in a language and hence more competent. Instead, the students are at a stage where they actually feel less competent because they become aware of all the things they do not know. As to a general change in attitude, they had already learnt to see things from a non-Swedish perspective before they chose to enter the course.

An additional argument in support of the claim that language students are conceptually advanced is based on the metaphors they use. Marton et al. mention the consumption metaphors used in their investigation by the students at the lower levels, for example 'pick up', 'absorb', or 'fill one's head'. The students of Spanish described their struggle with the study material with words like 'obstacle', 'barrier', or 'hindrance'. The students saw their endeavour as an almost physical struggle: 'to get over', 'to get into', 'not to feel burdened by too much thinking', 'to feel free' within the new language. Those students who already felt integrated, who felt they already were 'in' did not use these words but instead expressions like 'having complete mastery of', 'control', and 'feel certain about'. It is obvious that you first have to 'get over the wall' before you can 'master' the new situation. Still more advanced language students use construction and pattern metaphors.

The categories of description - the main result of the study - can be re-applied to the material which gives a quantitative result for that particular group. This study is based upon one first-semester group and one second-semester group in which more than half of the students also were part of the first group. The students began their studies in the spring semester of 1992. Most of the students were about 23 years old.

There was of course a noticeable difference between the students who had lived in a Spanish-speaking country before entering the program, and those who had not. In order to include this important feature the students were divided into two groups, the ´school group´ and the ´travel group´. It should be noted that as regards first-semester students the dividing line between the groups was having spent more than one month in a Spanish-speaking country. For second-semester students this was not an interesting distinction, since virtually everyone had been more than one month in a Spanish-speaking country. In this case the dividing line was three months' stay.

The first group consisted of 31 students out of which ten had studied Spanish for three years at school and been in a Spanish-speaking country for a month or less. 21 of the students had been in a Spanish-speaking country for longer time, often six months or more. Many had had extensive contact with Spanish-speaking people.

The second group consisted of sixteen students out of which only eleven had studied the basic '20-credit course' the previous semester. The other students had studied that course earlier or at another university. Thirteen of the students had stayed in Spanish-speaking countries for more than a month. The following conceptions were expressed by first- and second-semester students:

	1.a	1.b	2.a	2.b	3.a	3.b
31 first-semester students	5	9	4	8	2	3
16 second-semester students				5	3	8

The results show the advanced type of conceptions held by all students at the end of the second semester. The figures from the second semester are due both to the fact that some students in the lower categories had left and, more important, to the fact that those who remained developed more advanced conceptions. Even if the students were not always aware of their development, they had changed to some extent.

We asked the question whether language students were intellectually advanced and whether the categories elaborated by the researchers of the phenomenographic school did fit language students, and the result was that Säljö´s categories were not particularly useful for describing the differences between the conceptions of learning of these students, maybe precisely because they proved to be advanced in their conceptions. These language students certainly did not look upon language learning as rote learning. On the contrary. They saw foreign language learning as a complex task involving intellectual, practical, psychological, and social learning.

So, when Säljö, Marton, and other phenomenographers all say that the students who aim for meaning have qualitative conceptions of learning, it can be claimed that language students are advanced in their thinking because looking for meaning is exactly what all language students do all the time. This study indicates that studies of foreign languages both presuppose and develop advanced conceptions of learning. Focusing on language, the students are forced to think about how language works and what it does, even if the basic foreign language university courses are not really theoretical courses.

Indepth and surface approaches

Säljö*(1982)* found in his study that many of the students did not understand academic texts because they did not know what to look for. He elaborated four categories of

approaches to the understanding of a text, but he also underlined that what exactly constitutes a depth or a surface approach to learning varies according to the actual academic task. Depth-oriented students report conscientious and well-organized study habits and try to grasp the whole structure of a study field. They develop an active, critical, personal way of dealing with the study material. Säljö´s four categories are:

* *Surface - passive*. The student mentions a couple of facts or arguments without saying how they are related.

* *Surface - active*. The student mentions certain important facts without saying how they are related.

* *Indepth - passive*. The student mentions certain important facts and how they are related.

* *Indepth - active*. The student understands the message, identifies the arguments and explains logically how they are related. The student distinguishes between general statements and examples.

In several research projects Marton-Hounsell-Entwistle*(1984)* have maintained that if students were told to use a surface approach to a task this created boredom and anxiety. If students could take a indepth approach they found the material more interesting and easier to understand and were, subsequently, more inclined to spend ´time on their task´. Studies using a surface approach was a tedious and unrewarding activity. Marton*(1992)* and others have repeatedly said that the approach is not typical of an individual but rather a response to particular circumstance.

A problem with these concepts in realation to language learning is that language learning only partly is an intellectual pursuit, as we have seen. Here the question of the nature of depth strategies in subjects with both intellectual and practical components remains open.

To write a summary of a text is a basic intellectual skill trained and tested in secondary education. To use summaries should therefore be a valid means of studying the students´ approach to learning and their handling of their mother tongue. At the beginning of a spring semester, in January, a group of first-semester students of Spanish were asked to write a summary in Swedish of a feature article in Sweden´s largest newspaper. The theme of the article was the role of intellectuals in French, American and Swedish society. Students were instructed to emphasize the message. Simultaneously, they were asked to

answer, in writing, three questions about their conceptions of learning foreign languages and about their studies.

In May, the students were asked to write a summary on another Swedish feature article and on a much shorter article in Spanish from a Spanish weekly magazine. The Swedish article was a critical review of how history is taught at the university in Sweden. The second was an article written in support of the Spanish Socialists facing general elections in June 1993. The instructions were the same as in January. The articles were chosen with three criteria in mind: they were about intellectual issues, they had a clear structure and a clear message, and they were sufficiently complex to produce a difference in understanding between the students. An interview was also made.

This material was studied from different points of view. The indepth understanding of the structure of the articles was studied using Säljö´s definitions of depth and surface approach. The ability to write coherently was compared to the results of Wikborg-Björk.*(1988;1989)* Concord was compared to Thagg-Fisher´s study.*(1985)* The complexity of the sentences was studied so as to be able to compare with the Spanish written by students. Errors of the type that teachers normally correct in secondary school, such as spelling, reference, and capital letters, were also studied.

The students in this part of the investigation studied first-semester Spanish at the University of Gothenburg during the spring of 1993. 28 students participated in the study in January, and 22 of them remained at the end of the semester. 20 out of the 28 had spent more than a month in a Spanish-speaking country, often six months or a year as an exchange student, an *au pair* or a tourist guide. Eight had learnt Spanish only in secondary school. There were no native speakers of Spanish nor any students of other foreign extraction. Spanish was the first university subject for 17 but several students had already taken a university degree, usually in economics. As to conceptions of learning, this group was more advanced than the first-semester group described above, who had studied one year earlier.

The interviews at the end of the semester were attempts to bring out the ideas about arts students. The students who had studied other subjects earlier said that among their fellow students of economics and technology, there was a unanimous opinion, that arts students were neither serious nor hard-working. However, after a semester of Spanish, the students who had degrees in economics or technology said that at least they had changed their opinion because they had seen how difficult it was to pass in Spanish and how hard the students worked.

Now, did these students use indepth or surface approaches on the summary task? Less than half of the students used an indepth approach on the first occasion, but a semester of study made them more advanced in this respect. Particularly noteworthy is that there were only two students in the category ´surface-passive´ at the end of the first semester. The results also show that the students were not ready, after one semester of Spanish at the university, to use their general intellectual ability when they dealt with a Spanish text.

summary number	surface-passive	surface-active	indepth-passive	indepth-active	number of summaries
1 (Sw)	7	8	8	3	26
2 (Sw)	2	7	4	9	21
3 (Sp)	6	6	5	3	19

The most interesting results are those of the second summary of a Swedish text, where few surface-passive summaries and many depth-active ones can be found (line-two). Thus, compared to the groups Säljö studied, these language students were not less intellectual than other students, even though university teachers would, of course, wish for all students to adopt an indepth-active attitude from the start. It is interesting that the results got better even if there was no course in the study program that prepared the students for these tasks.

Elusive remains what exactly is an indepth approach to language studies. A typical surface approach might be to think of vocabulary or rule knowledge quantitatively, whereas a depth approach might be to emphasize both structure and appropriate vocabulary and the ability to speak fluently and correctly. A depth approach seems to combine high structure, a strong knowledge base and versatility and might consist of a successful integration of knowledge from different areas and an ability to apply one´s knowledge and experience to new situations. Language learning is a hybrid, not a ´pure´ academic subject, but so are many other subjects. Perhaps what distinguishes languages from dentistry, social work or laboratory work is that in foreign languages you cannot really postpone the practical part of the knowledge until you have learnt the theory. That is also what the results of this research indicate.

Complexity and correctness in the mother tounge

Enormous pains are taken to improve the students´ foreign language skills, but what skills do they possess in their mother tongue? Can the teachers build on existing knowledge? How do the student form sentences in their own language? How well do they spell? What about concord phenomena in their own language? Is it correct to assume that the students know how to use their mother tongue correctly? In short: Does the work in foreign language departments consist in transferring to the foreign language skills that the students already possess or do they have to learn something totally new?

In the same material that has just been mentioned, the complexity of the students´ sentences was compared in January and May, and between the students and the authors of the articles. The result showed that the proportion of different sentences did not change between the different types of writers. Most of them used basically two types of sentences: sentences consisting of one main clause or a main clause and a subordinate clause. There was no systematic variation between students and articles. The two most frequent clauses were those that functioned as an accusative or as an attribute. This was a ´disappointment´ as the students were young people studying at a university writing about intellectual subjects. One could ask if they should not have used the ´intellectual´ causal, conditional, concessive and comparative clauses more in order to highlight the argumentative structure? However, the original authors of the articles did not use these ´intellectual´ clauses more frequently than the students did. It is thought-provoking that these sentences are not used more by Swedes writing in their mother tongue. As a university teacher, one often suspects that the students avoid difficulties when they write short, easy, and not so varied types of sentences - but our findings are that researchers often use a similar simplifying strategy.

The first finding was that there were three distinct groups among the students, distinguished by their way of using their mother tongue in writing. Groups which could be called the ´orthodox´, the ´cautious´ and the ´unorthodox´ group respectively. The ´orthodox´ students wrote as one is supposed to do after having been trained in secondary school. The cautious also followed the rules but wrote very little. Most of the incomplete and incorrect sentences were written by a group of eight out of 28 students, the ´unorthodox´, who wrote as much as the orthodox but took risks. These eight students had written 67 % of all the incorrect sentences. The most important differences were between the 'cautious' students who did not take any risks and the unorthodox ones who took many. One might think that language students like to talk and write and are good at it, but this is not necessarily so. The cautious students did not seem to like writing, and the unorthodox students were not particularly good at it. They would hardly

have been able to write a thesis for their *baccalauréat* in the times when Sweden still had that exam.

Another finding was really astonishing: the ´creativity´ in word formation and the concord errors that appeared especially in the unorthodox students´ summaries and written answers. The students ´invented´ words that were easy to understand but that do not exist in Swedish. This gives the observer the impression that the students in question have read very little. One might also think that there would be no concord errors when students write in their own language. There was one concord error for every 619 words, in summary texts, and one per 726 words, in answers to questions. Possible explanations for this curious phenomenon might be carelessness, when writing in the mother tongue, or lack of good working habits in conjunction with a lack of knowledge of the specialized word used in the articles to be summerized. There were also spelling errors, but they are less surprising, as the Swedish school system does not insist on the importance of spelling.

The question whether the students knew how to use their mother tongue and ´only´ needed to transfer that knowledge to the foreign language, could be answered as follows: It is evident that today, many students must learn at the university level things that are totally new to them, which they ´ought to´ have learnt in secondary school. In this study this holds true for the unorthodox students.

In this connection one can make a couple of concluding points: These students do not belong to a linguistic elite. The Swedish school system does not emphasize written language or correctness. Correctness has often been judged as politically conservative, whereas a more ´liberal´ view on errors has been judged more ´democratic´. The problem is that the modern view on language is that language is not only a ´dress´ in which you ´clothe´ your thoughts but a fusion of thought and word. A guess, after having worked with the students´ summaries from every possible perspective, is that the university course in Spanish must seem extremely hard and bewildering for those who have a weak linguistic and intellectual background.

In the investigated group of students, only 20 out of 28 Swedish students could be said to write Swedish well. What kind of knowledge of the country´s dominating language should be required for university studies? What kind of knowledge should be required from Spanish-speaking or for example Polish-speaking students? There is an ongoing debate whether university foreign langugage studies should build upon the mother tongue or not, partly in view of findings in second-language research, partly because of the new student groups with people of very different ethnic and linguistic background. The result

of this study is to make the confusion worse by showing that some of the Swedish-speaking students commit what is generally considered to be ´foreigner errors´.

Students' translations

In 1986, Krings published a study, *What happens in the Heads of Students who are Translating?* (my translation), of how German students of French translated from French into German and from German into French. The students were advanced students, mostly in their fourth year, about to take their degree, specializing in French and having spent at least half a year in France as part of the university program. He used thinking-aloud protocols and taped the sessions. The students were asked to use different pencils so that he could study their changes. They brought their own dictionaries to the sessions which lasted roughly two hours. The texts he worked with where newspaper texts on topical incidents.

The main findings were:
- The students were extremely dependent on their German-French and French-German dictionaries. To use the dictionary was the single most important strategy.
- They made some fairly elementary errors when translating into French.

The main results, according to Krings, were the enormous difference between translating from or into your mother tongue. He was astonished over the fact that translating into your mother tongue was not more important at the university, since this translating activity was the only one that the students could do with any 'rate' of success. Translating into German was a reception problem and the students tended to use the context to check the acceptability of a translation.When the students did not understand part of a sentence, the tendency was to treat the problem as a word problem, to use a ´micro-strategy´, instead of looking for meaning on a larger scale. When translating into French they treated the sentences as a combination of different problems which they resolved separately.

Krings´s study shows that it is considerably more difficult to speak and write a foreign language correctly than people outside the language departments think. In Sweden, we often blame our students´ shortcomings on the fact that they only dedicate roughly a year to studying a certain language. Krings´s students specialized in French, studied only that subject and still made elementary errors. The question is: What happens when Swedish language students translate? How much do their use their mother tongue? How much do

they refer to grammar rules? Can they correct themselves? What capacities within themselves are they aware of using?

Research method

The purpose of this part of the project was to study the most traditional part of a traditional university program: the translation into the foreign language. Two different second-semester groups were asked to translate sixteen to twenty sentences from Swedish into Spanish at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The research design was different from Krings´s in that there was no translation into the mother tongue, there were two translations with each student with a semester in-between, and no dictionaries were allowed. The texts were based on extracts from Spanish novels and were edited so that they contained certain grammatical features and were comparable. Some of the sentences were short and relatively easy, but some were long and fairly difficult, as in a grammar-translation test. It was not a communicative, but a traditional kind of task. All the texts contained sentences in the past tense and at least one subjunctive, the main grammatical difficulties for all categories of Swedish learners of Spanish. All the texts contained at least one imperative and one idiomatic expression, features which might be easier for students having travelled. All the texts contained features which might be easier for students having learnt their Spanish in school only, ´grammar-book knowledge´ such as articles, special pronouns or prepositions, and spelling changes.

Each interview lasted one hour and was taped. The students were asked to think aloud while translating, and time was allowed for the student to go back and check on the translation or to fill in if blanks had been left the first time. Afterwards, the students were asked how they had learnt Spanish, how much time they had spent in Spanish-speaking countries, what they had learnt from the first-semester course and what they expected from the second-semester course or, at the end, what they thought of the course. They were also asked a retrospective question: What capacities within themselves had been the most important while translating: the accumulative knowledge from previous experiences of listening to and speaking Spanish, from learning grammar or from assimilating words and expressions from reading? During the work with the translations, the students were also observed by the researcher. The translation was not an examination test for the students, so they had not done the usual "cramming" beforehand and had no need to feel nervous, even if the presence of the researcher and the tape recorder might have intimidated some.

When all the interviews were completed and the translations rewritten, three university-trained native speakers of Spanish were asked to evaluate each one of the translated sentences. The translated sentences were also examined in order to see what types of error the students made, whether there were less errors after the semester and whether different groups of students made more progress than others.

The students described here followed the second-semester program during the autumn semester of 1992 or the spring semester of 1993. The degree of grammatical difficulty was of a kind one would expect students at this level to be able to handle, and the contents were of the kind the students encountered in the novels they read and in the grammar and translation test they took. All the material has been published separately, and it includes the sentences to be translated, the translations made by the students, and the evaluations made by qualified native speakers.*(Enkvist, 1994:1)*

The first group comprised seventeen students. Seven of these students had spent less than three months in a Spanish-speaking country and will be referred to as the school group. Eight students had spent more than three months in a Spanish-speaking country and will be referred to as the travel group. Two students were native speakers of Spanish, both of them born in Chile. The second group comprised twenty students of whom three were school-group students and seventeen travel-group students. There were no native speakers in that group. The fact that out of 35 Swedish students, 25 had spent more than three months in a Spanish-speaking country indicates that the students were both involved and enthusiastic about the language. It should be noted that there were no visible differences between these groups other than the travel experience and consequently a longer exposure to the Spanish language. One could not say that the school-group students were for example more ´intellectual´. In the travel group there were many students who gave an ´intellectual´ impression.

´Thinking-aloud´ study

The students struggled with the language; they wanted to write correctly but had difficulties using the rules they had previously learnt. One surprising finding was that the students did not go about translating in the ´intellectual´ way that could be expected at university level, but they relied on automatized knowledge of words, expressions and verb constructions to a much greater extent than one would have imagined.

The observable thought processes were less varied and less deep than one might have guessed. After they had decided on a translation, the students mentioned tense rules or

the rules for using accents, but there was little apparent reflection. Translating, such as it appears in these students, becomes a question of making decisions and taking calculated risks. They chose the expression to a large extent by reading the sentence aloud and listening to the rhythm. Both travel-group and school-group students appeared to be governed to an amazing extent by the sound of the chosen expression.

Translation was a stressful activity for these students because they were well aware of their own shortcomings. They judged their own performance as they went along: "This does not sound good." "They would not say that". "How stupid I am not to remember that expression." "I have looked that word up in the dictionary ever so many times." Therefore, the shortcomings were not due to the students believing themselves better at Spanish than they were, but due to too little experience of the language. The students were painfully aware that the sentences they produced were not idiomatic. The result of this research shows that the students were not anywhere near the kind of knowledge you must have of a language to be able to translate relatively correctly, and they knew it.

When a word escaped the students, they would say the sentence aloud, in Spanish, to see if it would come to mind. Only a few of them looked for Swedish synonyms for the word they wanted to translate, and these students mostly belonged to the school group. The students who sought help from the equivalent English or French word were surprisingly few, even if that would have been a productive strategy. It was evident that the students mostly stayed within the language they were working with, Spanish. At the beginning of the semester, a few students reported, however, that they were ´disturbed´ in their work by English or French ´cross-over´, but that had disappeared by the end of the semester.

There were differences between the school-group and the travel-group students. The school-group students were the only ones who for example would sometimes say all the forms of a verb in a certain tense before selecting one. The travel-group students were more likely to write down the translation without thinking and without explaining why they chose that solution, behaving like native speakers. They just ´knew´ and did not or could not analyze their knowledge. Both groups felt insecure about the subjunctive in cases other than the most simple ones. The travel group was somewhat less insecure about past tenses than the school group. A curious phenomenon was that a few students referred to what they would have said in a situation where they would have had to say the sentence as an argument in favor of a certain translation.

The most important finding was that all the students, school and travel group alike, referred to how the sentence sounded more than to intellectual rules. If most students let

themselves be governed by the sound, one student, however, consistently spoke about how the word ´looked´. When she felt uncertain, she wrote the word down so that she could see what it looked like.

When the students could not say a sentence immediately, they preferred to wait for a rapid flash of knowledge rather than to start using other strategies. If and when the ´flash´ came, they checked if the sentence was correct by saying it aloud. If the ´flash´ did not come at once, the general strategy was to wait for it to turn up later.

It was noticeable that the students would say: "I know that we have talked about this rule on the translation course or on the grammar course, but I don't remember it." Their reaction seemed to indicate that they could not use rules learnt recently. This would indicate that they were not on the ´40-credit level´ as far as applying the rules was concerned, even if they had passed the formal grammar test given earlier in the semester. This result seems to indicate that the university should consider its course program. Maybe the students really *need* more oral work.

Observation

The best students did the translation very rapidly. They did not hesitate and did not ´discuss with themselves´ which solution to choose. They seemed to have automatized their knowledge and were not interested in finding out why. They checked by saying the sentences aloud to hear if it ´sounded´ correct. Most of them belonged to the travel group.

The travel-group students in particular would repeat the beginning of the sentence as a strategy, in order to recall a word by the rhythm of the sentence, by giving it an auditive context.

The most striking, and unexpected finding in the observation was that most of the travel-group students used gestures to find words that did not readily come to mind. In the text, words like ´pat´, ´shoulder´, ´hold out one's hand´ would incite the students to use their hands to help recall the word. They searched for the words in their ´body memory´. There was a clear difference between the groups in that no school-group student used this means of bringing a word to mind. The travel students might have got better results because they had more and more varied strategies to choose from. If all students had possibilities of using the language in varied situation at the university, maybe the school-group students would be able to develop this kind of strategy too.

Completing the sentences or making changes

The students were given time to complete or change the translation after finishing the task. They were asked to change pencils so that the researcher would know which changes had been made and which words were filled in later.

The second time the students frequently filled in words that had not occurred to them at first, rather than changed words. Most of the translations that spontaneously has come to mind were retained. In the case of the gaps left the first time, there was sometimes a ´flash´, sometimes not. What took place was not so much rethinking the sentences as filling in words and/or justifying the first choice. The changes made were often facultative, like word order.

Retrospection

After finishing the translation, the students were asked which abilities within themselves they had used and to list them in order of importance: A. knowledge of grammar, B. words and expressions learnt from reading, and C. memories from conversations with Spanish-speaking people, that is having heard or used an expression or a verb form. The school group and the travel group gave very different answers. The travel-group students consistently put ´hearing´ in the first place, trusting their own experience more than other factors. The school group, just as consistently, put ´grammar´ in the first place, ´reading´ in the second and ´hearing´ last.

In the school group, eight out of ten students gave the same answer both when they started and when they finished the semester: 1. grammar 2. reading 3. hearing.

In the travel group there were two common answers. Nine travel-group students chose: 1. hearing 2. grammar 3. reading. Six students did not change the order at the end of the semester but for the three other students the tendency was for grammar to gain in importance. The second choice made by as many as eight travel-group students was: 1. hearing 2. reading 3. grammar. Four students repeated their choice at the end of the semester, whereas four students gave grammar a more prominent position. Many travel-group students said during the retrospection that they relied not only on having heard the expression but that they also tried to imagine the situation.They thought for example about special Spanish-speaking people, wondering what these people would have said. Few students gave reading the first position, in fact only three, one from the school group and two from the travel group. This result seems to indicate that if you have had

experience of the language spoken in the country in question you trust your real-life experience more tnan book knowledge.

Interview

What did the students learn during the first-semester course? They claim that they acquired a larger vocabulary and became aware of grammar rules. However, the vocabulary was not quite ´ready for use´ because they were still uncertain about the context in which the words learnt in books could be used. As for grammar, they knew in which areas there were rules, but they did not know the rules well enough to be able to use them as a matter of course.

When they expressed their wishes for the second-semester course, they all said that they wanted to learn how to speak better, learn more grammar and enlarge their vocabulary.

After the second semester, the students said that they were pleased to have learnt facts about famous writers and about the history of the language. They sincerely appreciated having learnt new things in areas that they hardly knew existed. At the same time they lamented not having the opportunity to speak and hear more Spanish during the course. Most travel-group students reckoned they had lost oral competence during the semester. One student said that she got a chance to say some four sentences per day, so how could she learn quickly?

This answer was reinforced by the comments to the retrospection questions. The school-group students said that speaking or hearing must necessarily come last because they had had very little training in those skills. The travel-group students said that they felt they had lost part of their ability to speak Spanish and that they ´trusted their ears´ less at the end of the course than at the beginning. Many of them commented that they hesitated whether they should put ´hearing´ the language spoken in the first place, since they had lost so much of their proficiency. Once more, the importance of being allowed to interact in the foreign language was stressed.

Special linguistic features examined

The special features included in the texts were compared between travel group and school group and between the start and the end of the semester. As to the imperatives,

subjunctives, and past tenses there is a slight or no improvement from the start to the end of the semester, the travel group starting out better and keeping that position.

Grammatical features learnt very early, often during the first year of Spanish in school, showed that about two thirds of the students produced correct forms both times, but the amazing thing is that there were errors at all. These are features early learnt, often heard and often read. Why had the errors not disappeared completely?

Features that might favor the conscious readers such as ´he added´, ´to shrug one's shoulders´, or ´to look away´, phrases from books that are often read but more seldom heard, were surprisingly often incorrect in both groups. It seems that the students were right when they said that they could make little use of the reading experience when translating.

In this study on how the students translate, the main questions were: Do they refer to grammar rules? Do they use their mother tongue? What capabilities within themselves do they use? In brief the answers were: The students tried to create a foreign language environment in order to get help from the sound and the rhythm of the foreign language in their search for vocabulary. Travel-group students also used their hands in order to find words. School-group students sometimes used Swedish synonyms and they would occasionally conjugate a verb before choosing a form. A favorite strategy with all the students was to wait for a flash. There was less overt grammatical reasoning than one might expect. The study suggests that traditional course design might underestimate the students' need for hearing and speaking the language, not only for acquiring that competence, but also for translating better.

Native speakers' evaluation

In order to study the quality of the students´ work, three university trained Spanish-speaking persons were asked to evaluate the translations. Before discussing these evaluations, one might compare with a study published a couple of years ago, discussing how native speakers understand ungrammatical sentences, for example sentences with conflicting concord phenomena.*(Mac Winney-Bates, 1989)* As concord will be the main linguistic feature studied here, some of the details of that study will be reported.The researchers built upon the ´competition theory´, investigating how evaluators decided when in presence of conflicting cues. The most important strategies in sentence comprehension and production were animacy, agency and event probability. So what happened if these cues were in conflict? They presented for example English listeners with the

sentence "The cow are hitting the horses" and found that the informants did not like the sentence very much, but in a forced choice situation they overwhelmingly chose the cow as the subject of the verb. In other words, they did not trust morphological cues to meaning, preferring to rely on word order instead. Speakers of richly inflected languages with variable word order do not behave this way at all; they trust the morphological cues, and rapidly choose the plural noun as the subject of a plural verb regardless of word order.

In another study in MacWinney-Bates, it was shown that English and Spanish listeners attended to different aspects of the same sentence input. English listeners showed little or no reaction to violations of grammatical morphology, but Spanish listeners did react, and strongly. French and Italian listeners also distrusted word order and made decisions primarily on the basis of semantic and morphological cues, just as Spanish listeners. The researchers underlined that there are degrees of word order dependence or morphological dependence, and German comes in-between English and richly inflected languages like Spanish and Italian. These differences of degree are reliable and predictable, following from statistical as well as structural facts in the languages in question.

For sentence interpretation in Spanish there were two cues more potent than others: verb agreement and the preposition ´a´ before an animate object. Verb agreement is quite regular and transparent in Spanish with explicit marking of number and person, each cell in the paradigm having an unambiguous form, and there is an extensive use of the preposition *´a´* to signal accusative role. The researchers set up a list, a continuum of cues important for sentence interpretation where *´a´* before an animate object and verb agreement were very important and word order less. Gender markers may seem superfluous to a Swede but they are crucial in helping the listeners of inflected languages to keep track of referents across a complex passage of discourse. Gender markers can be seen as a system for continuous ´updating´ of later words in the sentence.

Spanish-speaking evaluators

The sentences translated by the students were evaluated by three native Spanish-speaking persons with a university degree. Their evaluations were interesting from many points of view, as independent voices on the quality of Swedish university education and as native speakers reacting to cues that were conflicting, vague, or simply foreign. One of the evaluators was a Chilean man studying for his doctorate in Sweden and teaching conversation to groups of Swedish students. One was a young Spanish teacher who had just arrived in Sweden, working as a language assistant at a Swedish university. The

third was a Peruvian teacher and sociologist currently pursuing studies in Spanish at the 80-point level to become a teacher of Spanish in Sweden. All three lived in a completely Spanish-speaking environment, as they spoke Spanish both at work and at home.

The translated sentences were grouped so that the evaluators got all the translations of one sentence on a single sheet of paper. There were four sessions with each of the evaluators as the evaluation of one translation took about three hours, and the task demanded a great deal of concentration. At the end, the evaluators were also interviewed about their general impressions of the translations and of the Swedish students.

The evaluators were asked to say whether:
1. *The translation could have been made by a Spanish-speaking person..*
2. *The translation was understandable but clearly produced by a foreigner.*
3. *The translation was incomplete or incomprehensible.*

All the comments were recorded, and this material has been published together with the records of the students' translations, as mentioned above.*(Enkvist, 1994:1)*

There was a good correspondence between the evaluations made by the three native speakers. When the evaluators sometimes hesitated between the categories ´good´ and ´foreign´ and between ´foreign´ and ´incomprehensible´, they did not seem to understand the sentences in different ways but sometimes they made different decisions as to whether one could really understand a particular sentence or not. To check whether the evaluators tended to judge in the same way 77 sentences chosen at random were studied. In 62 % of the cases the three evaluators had reached exactly the same decision, in 35 % they used two of the three categories and in 3 % they had used all the three categories. To check the reliability of the evaluations, some 80 sentences were presented to two of the evaluators a year later, and one gave the same answer in 82 % of the cases and another one in 86 %. The general tendency was to judge somewhat more leniently the second time. This procedure was not followed with the third evaluator as she did her evaluation later than the others.

The evaluators generally reacted as one would expect in the light of MacWhinney-Bates. They were very dependent on subject - predicate concord and a sentence with a verb problem immediately was categorized as foreign; with two verb problems, as incomprehensible. They found concord errors in noun phrases very primitive. In addition, even sentences with correctly inflected words were often discarded because of inappropriate vocabulary. A Swedish university teacher would have looked more at

grammar and ´forgiven´ a few vocabulary problems, but these evaluators reacted, strongly, to both grammar and vocabulary problems.

The texts were, as has been said, of a traditional kind and some sentences were short and easy, others long and more complicated. The general level of difficulty was such as the students met in grammar-translation tests. The general result of the evaluation was rather depressing for the university and for the students. 26 % of the sentences were judged to be correct, 31 % foreign and 43 % incomprehensible or incomplete. These figures can be presented in two ways. One can say that only 26 % of the sentences were correct and that 74 % were faulty, even if some of the sentences were very short and easy. Alternatively it can be said that in 57 % of the cases, the students succeeded in communicating the contents, even if the form was not correct. The result could also be expressed by saying that the students showed a basic communicative ability but they were far from being in control of the language at a formally correct level.

The evaluations were also quantified so as to get a general grasp of the quality of the translations and of the students' performances. If the sentence could have been written by a native speaker, it was awarded 2 points, if it was understandable but foreign 1 point, and if incomprehensible 0 points. As there were three evaluators each sentence could get 6 points.

The average result of the first translation in the first group was 3,6 points per sentence out of 6 possible points, and in the second translation, the average was 2,7 points per sentence. Only three students really showed a clear improvement, and nine students actually got worse results. In the first translation made by the second group the average result was 2,4 points per sentence out of 6, and in the second translation it was 2,14 points, that is the result was worse the second time. The same striking phenomenon occurred: only three students of out twenty actually got a better result the second time. What are the possible explanations? Could the two last translations have been much more difficult? This is not very likely, since they were designed to contain the same difficulties. All four texts were different and both groups got the same kind of result. Had some of the students not been as hard-working as the program presupposed? Some of the students who were less successful the second time had rather low scores the first time and seemed to have ´given up´, finding the demands too high and the rewards too slight. A few other students mentioned that the course did not correspond to their needs, offering too few opportunities of expressing themselves and they had lost interest because of that.

What were the characteristics of the few students who obtained much better results the second time? They were either extremely hard-working, ´school-oriented´ students or

they were living with a Spanish-speaking person. Their success seems to be due to two completely different reasons: The program was designed for the hard-working school-oriented students and there was a match between the student attitude and the program in the first case. In the second case, the students learnt outside the course and achieved good results in translating without being dependent on the course program.

This results pose a number of fundamental problems posed to the grammar-translation proponents:

If one has in mind the results from the observation and the retrospection study, it is obvious that the students need a lot more of practice at hearing, speaking and writing the foreign language. The difficulty is finding the optimal proportion between different learning activitites.

Another observation is that if the students are to translate at a test, they should only be asked to translate certain kinds of text types that they have practiced before. The usual kind of fictional texts used in order to have past tenses and subjunctives is far beyond the possibilities of these students.

Working with native speakers as evaluators is extremely informative. No one following the work of these evaluators could ever talk lightly of the importance of verb knowledge for foreign students. The students do need to work with their grammar, but the question is practical: what kind of training do they need? Were there, for example, too few lessons in grammar and translation? Though translation and grammar were highly estimated by the teachers, these courses only had a limited place in the program with about one fourth of the credits. At the same time, it is clear from the native speakers´ evaluation that grammar is not enough for translating. These students were somewhat better prepared in grammar than in vocabulary and idioms.

Error analysis in interlanguage

In the 1950s, the idea of contrastive studies between the mother tongue and the foreign language was still strong. Theoretical interest centered on the concept of transfer and especially negative transfer, and teaching was based on the ´grammar-translation´ method. Language learning was seen as learning how to avoid being influenced by your mother tongue when you spoke, or more often wrote, the foreign language. With Chomsky´s emphasis on the systematic nature of language and our innate competence for producing language and evaluating it, theoretical interest moved from comparison

between languages to the study of the systematic character of each language. The concept of interlanguage was launched by Corder*(1981)* in the 60s as an outgrowth of Chomsky´s competence/performance distinction, but the term itself was proposed by Selinker at the beginning of the 70s. The central idea was that learners´ imperfect language was also governed by rules and was stable and predictable, just as ´real´ language, even though it only represented a certain stage of development.

Corder set up two hypotheses, one strong - that the development of the interlanguage was the same in all learners irrespective of the learner´s native language - and one weak - that the development of the interlanguage was the same for all learners of the same native language.*(Hammarberg, 1979; Ellis, 1985)* It was shown that learners from different linguistic backgrounds seemed to acquire English structural distinctions in the same order and that children´s early acquisition also pointed to a certain order. The idea of basing teaching on avoiding transfer consequently suffered severe blows. Instead, the generally accepted view became that using cognitive structures from your mother tongue is a creative way to solve a problem until you have learnt how to use the foreign language properly. Transfer is seen as a strategy, not as an error.(*Dulay-Burt, 1973, 1980; Brown,1973*)

A lot of research has been done in the last decades on the concept of interlanguage. LoCoco*(1976)* showed that learners made more errors on free composition tasks than on translations, i.e. there were variations depending on the tasks the students were facing. The concept of interlanguage becomes more problematic when variation is found not only among learners but within each learner´s performance as well. This is why it is now commonly accepted that when you want to make a statement about a person´s interlanguage, you must mention if the task was oral or written and what kind of discourse type was used.

In this debate, Krashen*(1982)* rushed in as a whirlwind defying the whole language learning establishment with the claim that students gain much more from language acquisition than from language learning, you are learning more from listening, reading, and speaking the language than from ´studying´ the language the way you do in school, learning rules and listening to your teacher´s explanations. Since then most researchers have tried to show that Krashen was wrong, or at least that he exaggerated. Two of the researchers who have addressed this issue are McLaughlin*(1978)* and Bialystok.*(1990)* Both of them use the terms ´controlled´ and ´automatic´ processes. If a learner´s retrieval procedures are speedy and efficient, they speak about ´automatic´ access, and they attribute variability in interlanguage performance to the way in which different tasks and routines place different demands upon knowledge or control systems.

Knowledge about grammar rules is often called ´analysed´ knowledge in opposition to ´control´ which means being able to produce the correct form without necessarily being able to say why. McLaughlin pointed out that after a lot of practice, the learner´s language will be like the native´s and he or she will treat information automatically and with only peripheral attention. Thus, there is a shift from controlled to automatic processes, a gradual one, a continuum, so that performance on particular tasks over time gradually becomes less controlled, and more automatic. Tarone*(1988)* drew attention to the fact that the distinction between knowledge and control is not quite clear. If a student does not have access to his or her knowledge in all kinds of tasks, this would imply that knowledge itself contains both incipient new forms and old forms, that there are synchronic variations and not really a systematic interlanguage.

Other researchers pointed to other areas that influence the learner´s language. Schumann *(1978)* insisted that acquisition is dependent on the learner´s social distance from the target language, and that the process was different if the learner identified with the target language speakers or just wanted to acquire an instrument. Gardner-Lambert*(1972)* stressed learners´ attitudes as a main explanation for quick or not so quick learning, and others suggested that the ultimate cause of variation in language was the interlocutor.

The researchers mentioned above did not concentrate on university students. The problem with studying university students is that their language normally is developing very fast as it is exposed to intense language experience. It may therefore be difficult to point to why a certain change does, or does not, take place. In this study a few of the classical interlanguage questions will be examined in connection to concord and verb agreement such as: The students want to speak correctly and fluently. How much nearer this goal do they get in one year of university studies? How systematic is their interlanguage?

Longitudinal study of students of Spanish

A group of ten students studied the first semester (20 credits) during the spring of 1992 and the second (40 credits) during the autumn of 1992. The group consisted of nine women and one man and comprised all the students who studied the two semesters consecutively. All the students were between twenty and thirty years old. In order to be allowed to continue with the second semester they had to earn at least 15 credits during the first semester. Five students had been in a Spanish-speaking country for more than three months and will be called ´the travel group´, while the others will be called ´the school group´. Three of the students had studied at least one other subject at the university. There was also a native speaker, a slightly older man who studied with the

group both semesters. His goal was to acquire a better theoretical grasp of the language as he worked as a teacher of Spanish for groups of businessmen. He has been used as a control in this study and will be mentioned separately.

During the first semester two collections of data were made, one at the beginning and one at the end. Both times the students were asked to write answers in Spanish to questions having to do with their attitudes to studying a foreign language, their goals, and their conception of learning a foreign language. On both occasions, there was also a video recording with similar questions. During the second semester, two video recordings were made, one at the beginning and one at the end, where the students were asked questions about the development of their language and about the course. At the end of the course, they were again asked to answer similar questions in writing. On all occasions, there were questions about how the student had learnt Spanish, and how the students valued that experience, partly in order to provide opportunities to use the past tenses. There were also questions about what the students intended to do with their language knowledge, what they wished, or intended to do in the future, partly in order to draw out subjunctives. As an example, the questions given during the video interview at the beginning of the second semester were:

1. *What have you done during the summer? Have you been working or have you been to a Spanish-speaking country?*
2. *Have you learnt more Spanish during the summer?*
3. *What do you want to know or be able to do in December?*
4. *What do you wish from this second semester?*
5. *If you compare with when you started the first semester, do you start this semester with different expectations?*

The same students also participated during their second term in the translation study that has been described.

The most important difficulty for a Swede who wants to speak Spanish is the verb inflection in person, tense and mode plus the concord rules that govern noun phrases. The features that were chosen for closer study were precisely verb concord, articles, attributes, and complements of the predicate. Furthermore, the syntactic complexity of the students´ oral and taken productions was investigated. It should be noted that ´verb concord´ was used in a very wide sense, including the aspects that are expressed in the same ending: concord between subject and predicate, tense ´concord´ and mode ´concord´.

Oral performance

As luck would have it, the university had a Chilean technician with an interest in teaching and he volunteered to conduct the interviews. He asked the questions and reformulated them if the students did not seem to understand. This was an attempt to create a situation where it would not seem too unnatural for the students to speak Spanish. Each interview lasted some ten minutes, and only the technician and the student were present in order to diminish the possible strain on the students.

The main result was that the students did learn to express themselves much better, a result which one would expect after a year of study. Another result was that the differences between the students were very noticeable. Still another observation was that the students seemed to develop from the level where they were when they entered the program. Those who were good tended to keep that position. Those who spoke the most at the first interview also spoke the most at the last one.*(Enkvist, 1995:2)*

As to gender concord between noun and article, there were few errors. As to concord between noun and attribute there were few errors and the most astonishing thing was the rapid growth of the attribute category during the year, especially for the school group. However, the comparison with the native student shows that the students probably used the category too little even at the end of the year. The concord between noun and complement of the predicate showed a few more errors than between noun and adjective.

It is not surprising that verb concord is much more difficult than other kinds of concord. There is not only concord between subject and predicate with six different personal form in three types of regular verbs and many irregular, there is also concord in tense and mode to be considered. What is clear from the evaluators´ reactions, however, is that the most important kind of verb concord is that of conjugating the verb in the correct grammatical person.

When it comes to verb concord, it is interesting to look at the figures. The number before the slash is the number of correct forms produced, while the numbers behind the slash are the erroneous forms.

	First semester		Second semester	
	January	May	September	December
school group	67/8	110/7	201/20	241/8
travel group	127/5	200/7	206/5	229/17
native speaker	40/0	52/1		71/0

To master the verbs was seen as a central skill both by the Swedish students and the native evaluators in the translation study. It should also be mentioned that three of the ten students made more errors than the others, two of them being school-group students and one a travel-group student. If they are not counted, it is possible to see more progress for the other seven students, though not as clear and rapid as they and their teachers would wish. There was a somewhat more diversified use of the tenses in the later interviews, another result that one would expect.*(Enkvist, 1995:2)*

The fact that there was only modest progress in verb concord for the group as a whole should also be compared to what the travel-group students said at the retrospection after the translation sessions: they felt that they had lost oral skills during their second semester. The school-group students said that they felt that they could still not speak, even if that was their priority.

Written performance

The written production consisted, as has been mentioned, of answers written down in Spanish, and the style used by the students was colloquial. The number of words written was higher in May than in January, but the December number was low. In December the students might have felt that they had already expressed their opinions in the oral interview.

The concord between noun and article displays the curious fact that there was not better control than in oral production, and neither was there any improvement after a year of study. As to concord of the adjectival attribute, the number of errors went down in both groups, and in this case there were less errors in the written production than in the oral. As to concord between the noun and the complement of the predicate, the errors were few at the end of the second semester.

As to verb concord, the numbers of correct and faulty forms were:

	January	May	December
school group	101/24	237/15	98/9
travel group	123/27	139/18	82/13
native speaker	10/0	13/0	1/0

The verb concord became better but it was far from perfect even after two semesters of university studies. The travel group had worse results in verb concord than the school group, a fact that might indicate that some of them had become accustomed to speaking in

an ´ungrammatical´ way during their time abroad and that they could not or simply did not master their language sufficiently.

It is interesting to compare the number of concord errors in oral and written performances: In the written production of the school group there was in January one concord error for every 26 words; in May there was 1/57; and in December 1/56. In the travel group there was in January one error for every 25 words; in May 1/51; in December 1/61. In oral production the school group committed one concord error for every 90 words in January; in May 1/66; in September 1/51; and in December 1/103. The travel group made one error for every 118 words in January; in May 1/94; in September 1/162; and in December 1/94. Several of these figures astonish the observer. It is striking that there was more control in oral than in written production. There was no clear development in concord in the oral production of the students, and they sometimes actually retrogra-ded from one interview to another. The students complained about not getting the chance to talk, and these figures seem to prove that it is difficult to be in control if there is not practice.

Linguistic complexity in interlanguage

The types of subordinate clauses used by the students were studied both in written and in oral Spanish. All subordinate clauses were counted even those that for some reason were wrong. The figures were compared with those of the Swedish produced by the students of Spanish. That group wrote summaries and answers and the students in the longitudinal study only wrote answers, why the text types were not exactly the same. If the text type was more important than the language one would expect the variation to be bigger in the Swedish text.

The result was that the dominating categories were the sentences that had accusative or attributive function. An astonishing finding was that the sentences written in Spanish were more varied than the ones written in Swedish. One might have thought that the sentences in Swedish would be more varied than the Spańish ones, for the reasons stated above. Seen from this perspective, the students´ written Spanish was varied, even advanced.

Translation

The ten students in the longitudinal study also participated in the translation study. Their translations were studied for the same concord features as their oral and written production. It was extremely difficult to categorize the translation concord errors, and it might have been done differently, yielding a somewhat different result. Some of the students omitted some of the difficult sentences why the ´real´ level of lack of knowledge maybe should have been somewhat higher. The result was that there were concord errors with articles, attributes and complements of the predicate, but that 157 concord errors out of 166 had to do with verbs. The verb was the main difficulty. All in all, the students made 166 concord errors for 927 cases where the concord was correct. Another way of expressing the result is, that there was one concord error for every 21 words.

The conclusion could be that the students´ general level of Spanish is so low that it really should be regarded just as an intermediate stage, not as the final stage. This is a problem as the Swedish university system allows students to leave the university after two semesters of Spanish with a degree allowing them to work as comprehensive school teachers in Spanish or as economists with the combination Spanish, English and Economics.

Thagg-Fisher´s and LoCoco´s student groups had fewer concord errors on translation tasks than on free composition or free speech. The general explanation is, that the planning of what was to be said or written took such a large part of the planning capacity of the brain that there was little left to supervise the formal features of language. In the case of the students of Spanish, the explanation of the many errors might be that the translation texts were of a type that was far too difficult for the students. They had no real possibility of dealing with this kind of text, though this was what they were presented with when practicing in class and at tests.

It is interesting to look closer at the evalutation of these ten students by the native-speakers. When one compares the first and the second test, the results for the five school-group students were: one student became much better, one became somewhat better, one had the same result, and two got much worse. Of the five travel-group students, one became better, one somewhat better, one somewhat worse, one worse, and the last one much worse. What is the possible explanation? Maybe the problem is the translation situation, where the students can control neither vocabulary nor grammar. This result suggests that is is wise to accept that translations at this level have nothing to do with the professional use of translation.

Regarding the question how much nearer the students got the goal of speaking correctly and fluently and whether it was possible to see a systematic character in their interlanguage, the result could be described as follows: The students did become better but progress escpecially in verb concord was very slow. There was variation between tasks and between groups of students. These students produced a grammatically more correct language when speaking than when writing, and they made more concord errors in translation than in their oral and written production. As a group, the travel group had more control of their language in all kinds of tasks. They had had, outside of the university, more of the practice that the school group asked for.

Some of the concord errors were due to Spanish language structures, for example one can not see from the form of the word 'hospital' whether it is masculine or feminine. Some of the concord errors were due to the differences in structure between Swedish and Spanish, the most important being that the Swedish language does not inflect the verbs the way the Spanish language luxuriates in.

In turn these results could be the starting-point for a discussion with interlanguage researchers: Why was there not a steady improvement of concord in oral production? One possible explanation might be: As the students increased their vocabulary and learned new grammatical construction, their own language underwent such changes that it might entail a loss of some of the old security. What seems as a loss in skill might be a sign of ongoing growth and adaptation. Another hypothesis is that these figures are normal in the light of the limited possibilities of the student to develop their oral language.

There were fewer errors in oral production than in written, which is contrary to the findings of many other studies. Maybe the close correspondence between spelling and pronunciation in Spanish is part of the explanation. This, however, might explain why the errors in written and oral production were on the same level, not why there were less errors in oral production. Was the contents of the oral production easier or could the students use more familiar vocabulary and grammar? This does not seem to be the case as the theme was the same, language learning. Maybe these students supervised their oral language so much that it was close to the supervision usually given to written language, and maybe they were less used to writing Spanish than to talking Spanish so that they were not used to going back to check their written Spanish for concord errors.

An important general observation in this study is that verb concord is very much more difficult both in oral and in written production than other types of concord and that the students did not get very much better at it even after a year of study. These errors irritate Spanish-speaking people strongly and are considered to be very elementary errors. When

the concord between subject and predicate is wrong, the whole sentence can easily become incomprehensible.

It could also instigate a future discussion with foreign-language university teachers: As to the progress during one year of study, traditional university programs might not develop the students´ language in an optimal way. There was linguistic and intellectual progress in these students but not of the clear-cut kind. What they lack is practice, automatization, rather than more rules.

Krashen claimed that acquisition played a central and learning only a secondary role in foreign language learning, and the results here certainly showed that learning does not necessarily result in the production of correct forms, at least not with the speed that university curricula presuppose. Bialystok (1990) pointed out that the knowledge of advanced learners was qualitatively different in that the learners were developing the different types of knowledge differentially, resulting in less consistency of scores across tasks than was observable in the intermediates´ performances, which was consistently low.

In light of these results, a modified Krashen-McLaughlin-Bialystok attitude seems reasonable. The students of Spanish did get better, both objectively and according to their own estimation. Thus, explicit learning had a role to play. However, they did not seem to get enough practice for explicitly learned rules to be automatized. The rules learned were too many and too imperfectly learned to be really useful. The students needed more input, more practice and they might benefit from new kinds of grammar teaching.

The interlanguage of Swedish students of French

Bartning(*1989; 1990*) studied the interlanguage of students of French at the University of Stockholm. Her data came from repeated collection of oral samples from students who described comic strips, videos and they were interviewed during the first, second, and third semester. She reported her finding partly in form of profiles of weak and good students. The most interesting result was the weak progress made by the students in verb concord combined with the fact that the good students remained good and the weak remained weak. The weak students had less complex sentences, and it was not until the third semester that their number of final, temporal and causal clauses augmented.

Bartning presented a summary of the characteristics of weak students´ language in oral tasks where she emphasized gender errors, errors in verb concord, problems with pronouns, almost no use of the subjunctive, excessive use of the present tense, few clauses,

few adverbs or adverbial clauses, and poor vocabulary. The good students had better control of concord, especially verb concord, and a richer vocabulary. They showed few concord errors, displayed a wider use of modes including the subjunctive and the imperative, wider use of tenses including different past tenses, and more varied sentence structure.

As to verb concord, Bartning found the same variation in one and the same learner in different tasks that Tarone mentioned. There were fewer errors in the interviews where the students spoke about subjects they knew better than during the picture descriptions where they had to speak about situations that were partly unfamiliar to them.

Concerning sentence complexity, Bartning found that certain types of clauses became more frequent in the later interviews, such as clauses functioning as accusative, conditional clauses and causal clauses. The relative clauses showed a diminishing tendency, which Bartning explained as something to be expected as the relatives were often used when the students did not know a word. During the third semester their vocabulary underwent a rapid expansion so they did not need as many relative clauses as previously. The students might also have become aware of the possibilities of errors that the French relative clauses offer, and the diminishing number would then be an avoidance strategy. The question is, does the language of the students of Spanish show the same characteristics?

One would expect many similarities. In both cases the students were Swedes learning a Romance language, which is more richly inflected than Swedish and has a vocabulary that is very different from the Swedish. Also, the two groups were similar regarding to age and gender, and the study programs were similar, too. The students of French should be somewhat more advanced as they often had taken six years of French in secondary school, whereas the students of Spanish normally had studied for three years. The important differences one would expect would have to do with the morphosyntactic structure and the pronunciation rules of the languages.

The two materials can be compared keeping in mind that Bartning´s data refer only to oral production and include a third semester:

1. *In both groups, the main difficulty was the verb concord, and progress was slow. Not even with a third semester did the problems disappear completely.*
2. *In both groups, concord in noun phrases became better without becoming perfect.*
3. *In both groups, the students who were the most advanced ones when they entered the department tended to keep that position.*

The result seems to be that there is a lot of similarity between the students of Spanish and the students of French. Bartning´s results confirm how difficult it is for a Swedish student to reach grammatical control of a Romance language.

Concluding remarks

What are the general insights gained from this project?
These students had advanced conceptions of learning when they came to the foreign language department and they rapidly became more advanced because the nature of language makes it evident that words have to be interpreted and that the meaning of an utterance is not self-evident. This part of the investigation was very ´positive´ for the language students and the language departments.

However, quite a few students had ´unorthodox´ habits when writing in their mother tongue. Learning a difficult foreign language in a university setting must be very difficult for these students. The language departments can solve this problem in several ways. One way would be to accept that what used to be learnt in secondary education must now be learnt at university. A second solution would be to base the teaching almost completely on the foreign language, which might have the advantage of not creating extra difficulties for students of other origin than Swedish. The third solution could be to try to select the students more carefully. In any case, the foreign language departments might want to indicate in their information to future students that a good grasp of one´s mother tongue is an important asset.

For many years the bulk of foreign-language learning research was conducted within the structuralist model of language with great emphasis on syntax. Grammatical morphemes were seen as the crucial aspects, and semantics were not even mentioned. The translation study and the information from the evaluators show that syntax is indeed important, but also that it is as important to develop the vocabulary and the idiomatic expressions.

Recent linguistic research has shown that rules of grammar are so numerous and so complex that learning a foreign language seems to be an almost impossible undertaking. It is unclear how the mind can acquire and use grammatical rules within the explicit-teaching frame that grammar-translation advocates propose, so maybe it would be wise not to impose one method and instead be open to more varied learning-acquisition styles. The thinking-aloud protocol and the retrospection study showed that the students could not handle all the grammatical information they had been given. In a practical situation,

that information was of little use to them - if it was not automatized. The students pointed themselves to listening and speaking practice as a way to better control.

The main practical pedagogical insight from the study is how slow these students´ development was in verb concord and how important the verb concord was for the comprehension of learners´ language. Another insight is to question the translation tests of the kind which is generally used. A third insight is that the students were very far from their goal of speaking correctly and fluently. In the light of this study, university curricula should include more language practice. This would not impair grammatical learning but allow for automatization and thereby a correct use in production. Between explicit learning and controlled use there seems to be a continuum of implicit learning and practice that the student must pass through. As these students are conceptually advanced, they should not only be offered 'conversation classes' but also intellectually stimulating tasks including the oral performance.

Among the ´learner strategies´ highlighted, going abroad once more was shown to be important, together with other old-fashioned ´strategies´ like studying hard and/or getting a native-speaker boy friend. The adequate ´strategy´ for a foreign language department, on the other hand, seems to be to try to attract students with a good knowledge base and to make them work well by allowing them to work with tasks they find interesting, so that they will use indepth strategies, and which include a lot of oral and written production, so that they will acquire automatized language habits. To establish and maintain a good learning environment seems very important. Higher education builds on a combination of discipline and freedom.

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